

For Immediate Release
January 22, 2004

Contact: Hannah Willmann
(573) 751-2853

**CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH BILL BECOMES FIRST
BILL PASSED BY THE SENATE**

JEFFERSON CITY -- The Missouri Senate today unanimously approved the Children's Mental Health Reform Act introduced by Sen. Michael R. Gibbons, R-Kirkwood, and sent it to the to House of Representatives for consideration. Senate Bill 1003, the first bill passed by the Senate this session, would reform and reorganize the state's children's mental health services

"This bill is our opportunity to right a very grievous wrong," Gibbons said. "For far too long, we have forced parents of children with mental health problems to relinquish the custody of their children in order to receive care that the Division of Family Services provides.

"Fixing this problem is a top priority for the Senate, and this is why it has been our first piece of legislation to pass this year," said Gibbons, who also serves as Majority Floor Leader.

"This is an issue that came to my attention through a constituent," said Gibbons. "We worked very closely with them, and were able to avoid the relinquishment of custody, but that was after several months of work. Many other families do not have the same results."

According to Division of Family Services, there are almost 600 children in the state whose custody has been relinquished to the state. These children are not Medicaid eligible, and their parents often are told their insurance is no longer enough to medical costs.

-MORE-

“Parents get to the end of their rope and the state says ‘we can help you, but you will have to give up custody, and your name will be placed on the Child Abuse and Neglect Registry,’” Gibbons said.

After giving up custody to the state, parents lose the ability to have any decision-making power in their child’s life. This bill also begins a comprehensive program of children’s mental health that keeps families involved in decisions concerning the care of their child and provides better care for more kids with the same amount of money.

“We have been working very closely with the Department of Mental Health, Division of Family Services, and Citizens for Missouri’s Children and others, who all believe that the situation can be resolved using funds they already have,” Gibbons said.

“Today, we took a great step forward to bring hope where there has been despair, light where there has been only darkness, and joy where there has been nothing but sadness,” Gibbons said.

Sen. Gibbons currently serves as Majority Floor Leader in the Senate and represents the 15th Senatorial District.